



A Note from the Publisher

Terry and Max may finally get a bit of a break this month. With the P.I.'s finished (in fact, the third issue will be shipping out at the same time as this book) and the shop signings in what Terry calls "the Chicago Tour" winding up in December, I'm sure Christmas will definitely feel like a reward to those two. As if this wasn't enough to do along with a monthly title, Max and Terry have also just completed a "Munden's Bar" episode for First Comics' **Grimjack** (issue #11, which ships out in February). Rick Oliver, at First, describes it as 'a tribute to Will Eisner' and said that he was happy with both the story and Max and Terry's professional punctuality. I must admit that they are easy people to work with. Their enthusiasm, when coupled with the fact they are both hard workers, makes my job much easier to accomplish.

When Terry and I talked about the signing they did at **Chaos In Print** near Chicago, he mentioned how surprised he was that some fans seemed uncomfortable asking him to sign copies of Ms. Tree. True, the place was (true to it's name) chaotic, as it was their first day of business. They were even still setting up the shelves. But all kinds of people were there and Max and Terry had a great time. When you are a guest and you're sitting behind that table signing books and talking to people, it's not always easy to spot the "guys in the back" who don't want to 'bother' you. If you are one of these, please, come up and talk. I've often found that these are the fans with the 2 or 3 pertinent questions. Don't be shy, you are the reason that shop owners and publishers set up these signings; so that you can ask the questions and get your copy of Ms. Tree signed. This goes for conventions, too. It costs money to send artists to conventions, but they are there to make themselves available to you. One of the things I really like about the comics field is that the "entertainers" are accessible. This isn't rock-n-roll, or TV, or the movies, it's comics. So don't be shy. After all, those people on the other side of the table are just as human as you. So-- enough lecturing.

If Terry went ahead with the sepia, "we call it brown" for this issue, I think you are in for a treat. When I first saw last issue, I had to phone Terry right away - I was so pleased with it. The richness of the colour adds an extra dimension to the page. This issue should be even better as Terry improves on his technique. (You see--every time they decide on another colour, Terry has to re-think how the screens should be handled.) So, rather than keep you from enjoying the continuing mystery, I invite you to read on! The best is yet to come and it starts on the next page. See you here again next month.

Deni

Ms. TREE

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President: Dave Sim

Publisher: Deni Loubert

Assistant to the Publisher:
Karen McKiel

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Mark Spencer

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15
JAN

MAX COLLINS and TERRY BEATTY'S

200
CANADA
170
IN U.S.

Ms. TREE

ONE OF THESE IS
A PORTRAIT OF A
MURDERER!

*Beatty*

© 1985

Chapter Three

by Max Collins and Terry Beatty

I DROVE OUT TO THE SUBURBS,
WHERE OFF IN ONE CORNER
OF A SHOPPING MALL PARKING
LOT WAS KING LEER'S KASTLE —
A THIRD-RATE, WOULD-BE PLAYBOY
CLUB WHERE SKIN-MAG PUBLISHER
HARRY RYND HELD COURT —



INDECENT EXPOSURE

WE'RE CLOSED
HONEY—AND WE
AIN'T HIRING
—BEAT IT.

YOU MEAN THERE AREN'T
ANY OPENINGS FOR
MORE BIMBOS, AT THE
MOMENT? HOW SAD.
BUT THAT'S *NOT* WHY
I'M HERE.



I SAID
WE'RE CLOSED
—SO
BEAT IT!

TELL YOUR SLEAZY BOSS
MICHAEL TREE'S HERE
TO SEE HIM —
THAT'S TREE, NOT JACKSON.



SHE WENT TO DELIVER MY MESSAGE.
I'D STOPPED BY POLICE HQ ON MY WAY
HERE, AND WAS ARMED WITH SOME
INTERESTING INFO, REGARDING THE
MURDER OF WOULD-BE GIRLIE PHOTOGRAPHER
BUDDY GROSS —



MY INFORMATION SOURCE? LT. RAFF VALER
— WHOSE INTEREST IN THIS CASE WAS
PERSONAL, TO SAY THE LEAST, SINCE
HIS SISTER VERONICA WAS A PRIME SUSPECT—

MY COMPREHENSIVE SEARCH
THROUGH GROSS' PHOTO FILES
TURNED UP NOTHING MORE
THAN YOUR CURSORY ONE
DID: THERE WERE NO SHOTS
OF VERONICA ANYWHERE
TO BE FOUND —



EVEN WITH
HER CLOTHES
ON?

EVEN WITH
HER CLOTHES
ON.

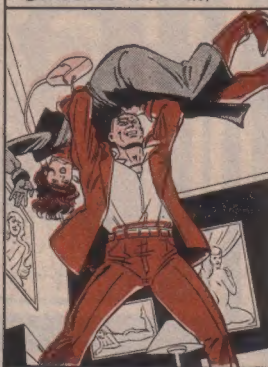
AND THERE WERE PLENTY
OF OTHER NUDES ON
FILE... IT'S STRICTLY
VERONICA WHO'S
CONSPICUOUSLY ABSENT—



ONE OTHER THING —
WE FOUND A PIECE OF
JEWELRY IN THE ROOM
WHERE YOU ENCOUNTERED
THAT GOLIATH —



" — IT MUST'VE TORN
LOOSE DURING YOUR
STRUGGLE WITH HIM — "



THAT LITTLE CROWN —
THAT'S THE KING LEER
MAGAZINE SYMBOL —



RAFE HAD ALREADY DONE HIS HOMEWORK, WHERE RYND WAS CONCERNED: THE PORNO KING WAS LIVING IN A PLUSH APARTMENT ON THE UPPER FLOOR OF HIS CLUB — WAS SAID TO SELDOM LEAVE ITS PREMISES — AND, EVEN AT THE "KASTLE," WAS ALWAYS ACCOMPANIED BY THREE HULKING BODYGUARDS...



ONE OF WHOM I WAS ABOUT TO MEET —

MR. RYND
DON'T WANT
TO SEE YOU —

FIRST GOLDLOCKS,
NOW THE BIG BAD WOLF,
TELL OLD KING COLE IT'S
POLICE BUSINESS, GOT IT?



LEAVE —

HEY!



DIDN'T YOU HEAR ME?
I SAID —



COME IN.



SHE WOULDN'T TAKE
NO FOR AN ANSWER,
MR. RYND.

I LIKE A GIRL
WITH COJONES.
YOU WANNA BE MY NEW
BODYGUARD, MS. TREE?



WHY, RYND?
YOU GOT AN
OPENING?

NAW —
JUST BEIN'
FRIENDLY —

Take a
hike, girls.



ARE YOU *SURE*?
I HEAR YOU USUALLY HAVE *THREE* BRAINLESS
GLANDULAR CASES LOOKING OVER
YOUR *SHOULDER* — TODAY, I ONLY
COUNT *TWO* — DID THE MISSING ONE
HAPPEN TO LOSE *THIS*?



PUT YOUR **GUN** AWAY,
MS. TREE. LET'S TALK
LIKE **CIVILIZED** PEOPLE—

SURE, WHY NOT?
YOU'VE PROBABLY BEEN
AROUND CIVILIZED PEOPLE
ENOUGH TO **FAKE** IT—

YOU SHOULDN'T COME ON
SO **TOUGH**, SUGAR—I HAVE
FRIENDS IN **CERTAIN CIRCLES**
WHO WOULDN'T APPRECIATE
YOUR **BEHAVIOR** HERE,
THIS AFTERNOON—

I KNOW ALL ABOUT
YOUR FRIENDS IN
"CERTAIN CIRCLES"—
I'VE KILLED SOME OF
THEM. AND I'LL
PROBABLY KILL
SOME MORE—

OKAY. YOU'RE NOT SCARED
OF ME OR MY FRIENDS—WELL,
WE'RE NOT SCARED OF **YOU**,
EITHER—SO LET'S PUT OUR
CARDS ON THE TABLE, AND
MAKE THIS MEETING AS BRIEF
—AND **PAINLESS**—AS POSSIBLE.

YOU WERE PLANNING
TO BUY VERONICA VALER'S
NUDES FROM BUDDY GROSS—
RIGHT?

"**WRONG**. I **DID** BUY THEM—
OR, ANYWAY, THE **RIGHTS** TO
'EM. BUT THE LITTLE S.O.B.
NEVER **DELIVERED** THE PICS—"

I SENT ONE OF MY BOYS
TO GET 'EM, BUT HE
FOUND GROSS **DEAD**—

"THIS 'BOY' OF YOURS — IS HE THE ONE WHO...?"

"MS. TREE, HE IS INDEED 'THE ONE WHO.' HE WAS STARTING TO SEARCH THE PLACE WHEN HE HEARD YOU COME IN — HE HID IN A CLOSET, AND WAS FIXING TO, WELL — ARRANGE A SHORT NAP FOR YOU, BUT YOU DIDN'T COOPERATE —"



AND THEN HE SEARCHED THE APARTMENT LOOKING FOR THE PHOTOS —

AND DIDN'T FIND THEM — LEAVIN' ME OUT FIFTEEN GRAND —



SO YOU CLAIM YOUR MAN DIDN'T KILL GROSS —



NO! WHY SHOULD HE? ALL WE WANTED WERE SOME LOUSY PHOTOS OF SOME DUMB BROAD WITH HER PANTS OFF! THAT'S JUST NOT WORTH DYIN' OVER, ALL-AMERICAN MISS OR NOT.



YOU'VE CONVINCED ME. THANKS FOR YOUR COOPERATION, RYND.

DON'T MENTION IT — UH, SAY... YOU SEEM TO GOT A NICE SHAPE ON YOU, UNDER THAT COAT OF YOURS —



WOULD YOU BE INTERESTED IN PEELING
FOR MY CAMERA? WE COULD RUN A
REAL CLASSY SPREAD ON YA — AND THE
PRIVATE DICKLESS ANGLE'S PERFECT!
YOU KNOW — "PRIVATE EYEFUL" —
THAT SORT OF THING?
THERE'S DOUGH IN IT —



MS. TREE, I HAVE NO
IDEA WHO MIGHT WANT
THOSE PHOTOS BAD
ENOUGH TO KILL FOR!



BESIDES YOU AND YOUR
FIANCE, YOU MEAN?
AND YOUR BROTHER?



RAFE WOULD
NEVER KILL
ANYBODY —

HE HAS BEFORE,
IN THE LINE OF DUTY —
AND THIS MIGHT BE
DUTY OF ANOTHER SORT —



I'LL SIZE UP YOUR **BOY FRIEND**, MYSELF — I HAVE AN APPOINTMENT WITH HIM IN ABOUT AN HOUR. WE CAN PRETTY WELL RULE OUT YOUR JOURNALIST FRIEND, GLORIA PLAYNE, BECAUSE **MURDERING** FOR THOSE PHOTOS MAKES NO SENSE — SHE COULDN'T PUBLISH THEM IN HER BOOK WITHOUT EXPOSING HERSELF. BUT WHAT ABOUT **YOU**, VERONICA —



DID **YOU** KILL BUDDY GROSS? THE BETRAYAL OF A FORMER LOVER IS MOTIVE ENOUGH. LET ALONE THOSE PICTURES, WHICH WOULD BE A DISGRACE THAT'D FOLLOW YOU THE REST OF YOUR LIFE — **PLUS** YOU'D FORFEIT YOUR ALL-AMERICAN MISS CROWN — WHICH IS WORTH **AT LEAST** \$100,000 TO YOU, OVER THE NEXT YEAR —



I DIDN'T KILL BUDDY, MR. TREE — I **HATED** HIM — BUT I COULD NEVER DO SUCH A THING.

IF YOU DID IT, TELL ME. I CAN STILL BE OF HELP.



BUT I DIDN'T! I **SWEAR!**

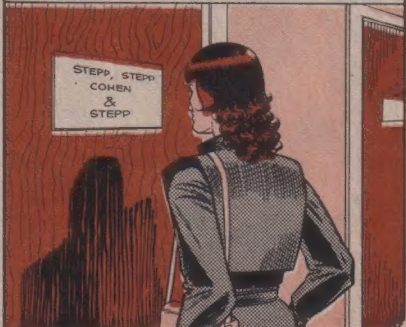
OKAY, JUST DON'T **LIE** TO ME, VERONICA — DON'T **HIDE** ANYTHING —



SHE SWORE SHE DIDN'T KILL BUDDY GROSS. AND SHE WAS CONVINCING ENOUGH. BUT SHE WAS A GOOD NATURAL ACTRESS — SHE HAD TO BE, TO HAVE WON THAT BEAUTY PAGEANT —



BILL HARRIS — VERONICA'S FIANCE — WORKED FOR THE LAW FIRM HANDLING THE MUERTA DEFENSE; THAT WAS THE SORT OF COINCIDENCE I DON'T TAKE LYING DOWN...





WHAT'S THE IDEA OF —
HAVE YOU GOT AN ALIBI FOR THE TIME OF GROSS' DEATH?



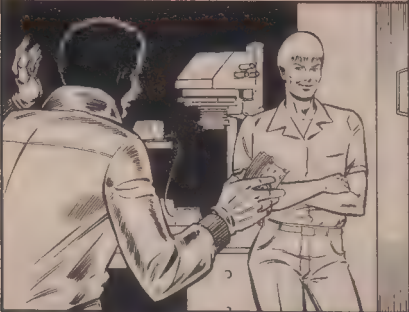
MS. TREE — I — I HAVE A CONFESSION TO MAKE.



THAT'S NICE. I HEAR IT'S GOOD FOR THE SOUL —



"I... I WENT TO SEE GROSS — IT MUST'VE BEEN WITHIN AN HOUR OR SO OF HIS MURDER — TRIED TO BUY THE PHOTOS FROM HIM — OFFERED TO MATCH HARRY RYND'S OFFER BUT GROSS REFUSED ME — 'NO WAY, JOSE,' HE SAID..."



"HE WANTED THE PICTURES PUBLISHED — EITHER OUT OF REVENGE FOR VERONICA LEAVING HIM, OR SOME MISGUIDED NOTION OF GIVING HER EXPOSURE, TOWARD MAKING HER A 'SHOW BIZ' FIGURE —"



I REMINDED HIM THAT VERONICA IS STUDYING DANCE AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION — SHE INTENDS TO GO INTO TEACHING, NOT SHOW BUSINESS — BUT IT FELL ON DEAF EARS.



SOON TO BE DEAD ONES.

I DIDN'T KILL HIM, MS. TREE, I SWEAR TO YOU I DIDN'T — BUT I DID SEE SOMEONE ARRIVING AT GROSS' APARTMENT JUST AS I WAS LEAVING —





Address all letters of
comment to:

SWAK
P. O. BOX 1007
MUSCATINE, IA
52761

SPECIAL NOTE TO OUR READERS

As you will probably have noticed, we have expanded our page count beginning this issue. We are not unfortunately able to add any story pages right now, the monthly schedule limits the amount of work we can do (and hope to maintain a certain degree of quality that is). The page expansion accommodates an extra page of letters and seven pages of advertising. Before any of you cry "foul" or "capitalistic pigs" or "foul capitalistic pigs" for that matter, allow me to explain that the extra revenue from advertising barely covers the extra printing cost. In addition to taking on enough paid advertising to pay the printers, however, we are also **trading** ads with various publications in order to get the word about MS TREE out to other readers who might not yet be trying the book. And we feel that the extra help of the book (bringing it up to 32 pages, even if the story pages remain constant) is a positive factor.

Also we realize that MS TREE has a (a-hem) discriminating audience. We are aware that a good portion of our audience is "civilian" - which is to say non-comics fans crossing over from mystery fandom. For that reason, we have carefully chosen our advertisers - so that, for example, mystery fans who normally don't read comics and **only** read MS TREE can learn about SABLE, THE MASKED MAN and MR. X and encounter perhaps for the first time the genius of Will Eisner and/or Jaxon. Those readers who've in particular been following my work may like having access to both volumes of MICKEY SPILLANE & MIKE HAMMER THE COMIC STRIP, which feature introductions by me and the EC CRIME SUSPENSORIES boxed set which features extensive notes by yours truly (and for those of you who have heard Terry Beatty and me talking about Johnny Craig's influence on both our work, an opportunity for MS TREE fans to get a sense of history and have a good time, simultaneously). Likewise, any and all MS TREE fans are likely to enjoy MODESTY BLAISE. Also, comic-book fans who are slowly but surely getting hooked on the mystery genre via our efforts here will be given access to the latest in new and recently re-published classic mystery fiction by Bob and Phyllis Weinberg. The Weinbergs are also a major order source for certain books you've seen advertised here in recent months, including TRUE CRIME and THE FILES OF MS TREE.

Additionally, our letters have so increased since the switchover to A-V that we wanted to make more room for

your comments. In the last few weeks, however, the mail has slowed somewhat, so we ask you to keep sharing your bouquets and brickbats with us, please. I know, I know... sometimes I'm sarcastic in my responses to your letters, but come on... you can take it! You're hardbodied MS TREE readers, after all.

Speaking of which, I would like to toss a grenade at you, gentle readers, which I trust you will smother with your collective body in SWAKS to come. As many of you know, MS TREE is the fairly frequent recipient of negative reviews from the folks at Fantagraphics. We have nothing against Gary Groth and company, and in fact heartily recommend much of their product, particularly the efforts of Rick Marschall toward reprinting classic strips. Rick's NEMO is a must for true fans of the medium, and the Marschall-edited COMPLETE E.C. SEGAR POPEYE is a Godsend. LOVE AND ROCKETS, DALGODA, THE SURVIVORS and HUGO are worthy efforts in the alternative field, check 'em out, and THE COMICS JOURNAL makes for lively if occasionally irritating reading, and frequently publishes in-depth interviews with comics greats and near-greats.

And now the reason I called you here today: Fantagraphics also publishes a popular superhero-oriented newszine called AMAZING HEROES. In the December issue, #60, R.A. Jones pauses in the midst of the usual Fantagraphics bad rap of Collins Beatty's MS TREE to propose the following thesis: "Today, almost every living room has a television. Why settle for the monthly adventures of MS TREE when every week you can get Cagney and LaCey with full color live action, familiar or exotic locales, and real people. The fact is that television can do anything that comic can do better. It's sorry in the area of super hero fantasy that comics can do a more credible job than TV. MS TREE is doomed to failure because it is a perfectly ordinary murder mystery, no more and no less, and TV does all genres - mystery, western and romance are singled out by Jones - better than comics."

In Iowa, this is what we spread on the ground to make the crops grow. However, I would very much like to hear your responses to the R.A. Jones dismissal of the comics medium in favor of that sterling harbinger of all that is narratively fine, television.

M.A.C.

Dear Max and Terry

Upon finishing MS TREE #13, the conclusion of Deadline, I should have been disappointed. I should have thought: "Max, c'mon, Jennifer Craig is the Singles Siasher? Ho hum. How predictable." Maybe I should be writing a letter of complaint? I am glad to write that you have not let me down. Sure, I solved the mystery too easily. But your style of writing combined with Terry's drawings didn't leave me bored. The nearest thing I can compare it to is the excellent FLETCH novel series by Gregory McDonald. His mysteries are never hard to solve, but his style of writing, characterizations, etc. has me entertained every time.

The ending, the last two pages, was quite forceful. Terry's use of red in the last two panels is justification enough for the two color format. I cast my vote for keeping the color of the month pattern. I think that the use of full color would have

distracted from the power and force of the last two panels. If there is a heavy amount of support for full color, that is supposing that anybody wants it. I hope you won't be swayed changing the color scheme again. Solution: why not a full color MS TREE ANNUAL?

Max, here's an idea for a feature to add to SWAK. How about a regular review of Private Eye fiction? While the big writers (Hammett, Chandler, Spillane, etc.) should be known to everybody, the lesser writers, and even the established ones are not that well known. Your magazine is for many people the first exposure to the world of the hard-boiled PI. Lots of television God hate to think of someone who, after reading a few issues of MS TREE, decides he/she wants to read a private detective novel, picks up some schlock novel, or the newsstand, and then throws the book away with distaste, leaving the genre with bad feelings.

J Alexander Hall SANTA CLARA, CA

Your letter is much appreciated. Whether the whodunit aspect of "Deadline" was easier than previous MS TREE mysteries to figure out, I'm not sure - so far yours is the only letter to broach that subject. However, keep in mind that guessing "whodunit" is not enough - to claim you figured out the mystery, you have to also have figured out the **reasons** for that particular whodunit. On the other hand, I freely admit that some of my mysteries are harder to figure out than others - and some are easier. I don't write by any conscious formula - and since I try to have the plots flow out of the characters (rather than the other way around), the degree of surprise when the villain is revealed in my story to story. I've been told that my Nathan Heller novels have very surprising surprise endings - and that my Malory novels don't. I have no explanation. But I will point to another of Mickey Spillane's rules that I follow religiously - which is to make sure the climax of the story is in itself surprising - so that if the reader has figured out who the murderer is, the reader will **still** be surprised, shocked by the resolution of the mystery - that is the fate the murderer meets.

Your idea for book reviews is a splendid one - but I'm going to toss it back in your lap, J. Alexander - and the rest of MS TREE's readers. We will gladly set aside space on our expanded SWAK section for guest reviews of private-eye novels by any of our readers who choose to submit them - we offer only glory (as opposed to pay) and request that when you send along such reviews, you do take time to comment on MS TREE's recent adventures, as well. Send reviews to the SWAK address above. Thanks for the notion, J. Alexander!

Dear Mr. Beatty

I have just started to collect original art and I would like a page of MS TREE. I think MS TREE is an oasis in the sea of superhero comics. There are so many superhero books, a book like yours is rare. The page I would like is page seven of chapter four of "Death Do Us Part." Please send me your prices. Thank you.

Jeff Hamblen, SALINAS, CA

Jeff, I am answering for Terry here as he is frantically struggling to get back on deadline after squeezing in work on the PLS and an 8-page "Munden's Bar GRIMJACK" back up story amidst his already crowded MS TREE schedule. Terry says his art rates are as follows: \$53 per page. Terry's choice - he guarantees Ms. Tree herself will be well represented, and does welcome lists of preferred pages, though I can't promise all pages are available. For those interested only in specific pages, write Terry about those pages and ask for price quotes (which may in some cases be higher than \$53 - since covers and splashes are available). Write Terry rate of the SWAK address above - include SASE.

Hi Terry

Boy, if there's any justice, the A-V MS TREE will be a hit this go around. I like the new stuff a lot. Your work is crisp and economical that color detracts more than it adds. Figure you can as easily manipulate mood with 2 ps as color. The screens really pop things out and let you play with texture a lot more. You probably work as hard on backgrounds as anyone. Most artists are included. Try to cheat on backgrounds more than you. The ultra bright crayon color on the slick stock did a lot toward flattening out and jerking too far forward all that hard work on backgrounds.

It may be that I'm programmed - but I prefer newsprint for comic books. This prejudice may be entirely irrational, based as much on the tactile as the visual.

I'll be following your stuff. It's good to know people are out doing what they want to do. Best of luck to you and Max.

Ellis Goodson, DALLAS, TEXAS

Ellis Goodson was the artist on "The Scythe" - the back-up feature in issues #2 through #8 of MS TREE. He is currently exploring work in the advertising agency field, doing storyboards. We wish Ellis the best of luck - he is a terrific guy and talented artist. Favorable fan comment on "The Scythe" still drifts into the SWAK mailbox from time to time - and those of you who would like to see a return of the character should write Dean Mullaney and/or Cat Yronwode at Eclipse Comics.

First, I want you to know that I've been following MS TREE's adventures from the beginning. I loved her in the early B&W ECLIPSE MAGAZINE days. I loved every chapter of her full color incarnation in her own mag at Eclipse and I was ready to sing with bells on when I heard that A-V was stepping into the breach to keep her story coming. In all that time, I've never written, but now I feel I must, because I've got to tell you that I **hate** this two color process you've been using. I've given it two issues to try to let it grow on me, and I've shown it to my friends - some familiar with earlier versions, some not - for their opinion - and I've gone over each page and honestly tried to appreciate the effect you folks seem to be trying for here. Nothing has helped. Of the half dozen people I've polled, exactly **none** have liked the new look - some even less than I. I appreciate your desire to experiment - but - please! - give us more of this particular one - since this current story line is completed. It makes Terry's line work look tacky and shallow. It just isn't working. Can you honestly compare issues 10 and 11 with what has gone before artistically and consider this anything but a giant step backward? Personally, I'd prefer a return to full color - but B&W would work for me as well (especially if you could up grade the paper at the same time).

As to regarding the recent art, I've noticed a tendency in #11 toward an over-reliance on zip action and a so-called tendency aggravated, I think, by over-dependence on the coloring process for effect - to abandon what once would have been meticulous backgrounds to a kind of minimalistic bank blur. (Check out virtually all of the interior scenes in #11, particularly the panels in the newsroom as examples of this.) Perhaps the current work crunch has kept Terry (and Gary?) from tending to such details with the usual care, but it's something I'd hate to see continue.

Just so you won't think I'm one of those comics "readers" who only look at the art, I'd like to assure you that it ain't so. All the pretty pictures in the world are useless without solid writing and the writing on MS TREE is so consistently top drawer that it's hard to imagine it could ever be anything else. May she match the longevity and fame of that square-jawed chap in the newspapers! I'd like to see our difficult-to-distress damsel work more closely with her staff in the future - and an occasional multi-parter with absolutely no tie-in with Dominic Muerta would be a most welcome change as well (this is something I hope I can look forward to in THE PLS at least!).

There's only one more thing on my mind, and then I'll sign off for now - count me among those completely indifferent to the appearances of MIKE MIST (save perhaps as a supporting character in MS TREE's own story-line). I'd **much** rather see the lady get those extra 2 pages per month herself. Is there any possibility that this might happen?

Thanks for your time

Sam Hain, NEW YORK, NY

We're sorry the two color process isn't working for you. Though perhaps the two color process is a better option somewhat less expensive. The majority of our readers, we think, would find the two color impractical at this time. Frankly, we're the way MS TREE has been looking from the beginning. I feel toward the mood of the duotone seems to be a little more to the sometimes garish Baxter color and white, and the storytelling going with fewer colors seems to give us and you some breathing space. The two color scripping has been done on backgrounds and ending back at issue #11 including the newsroom scenes. We will share your opinion.

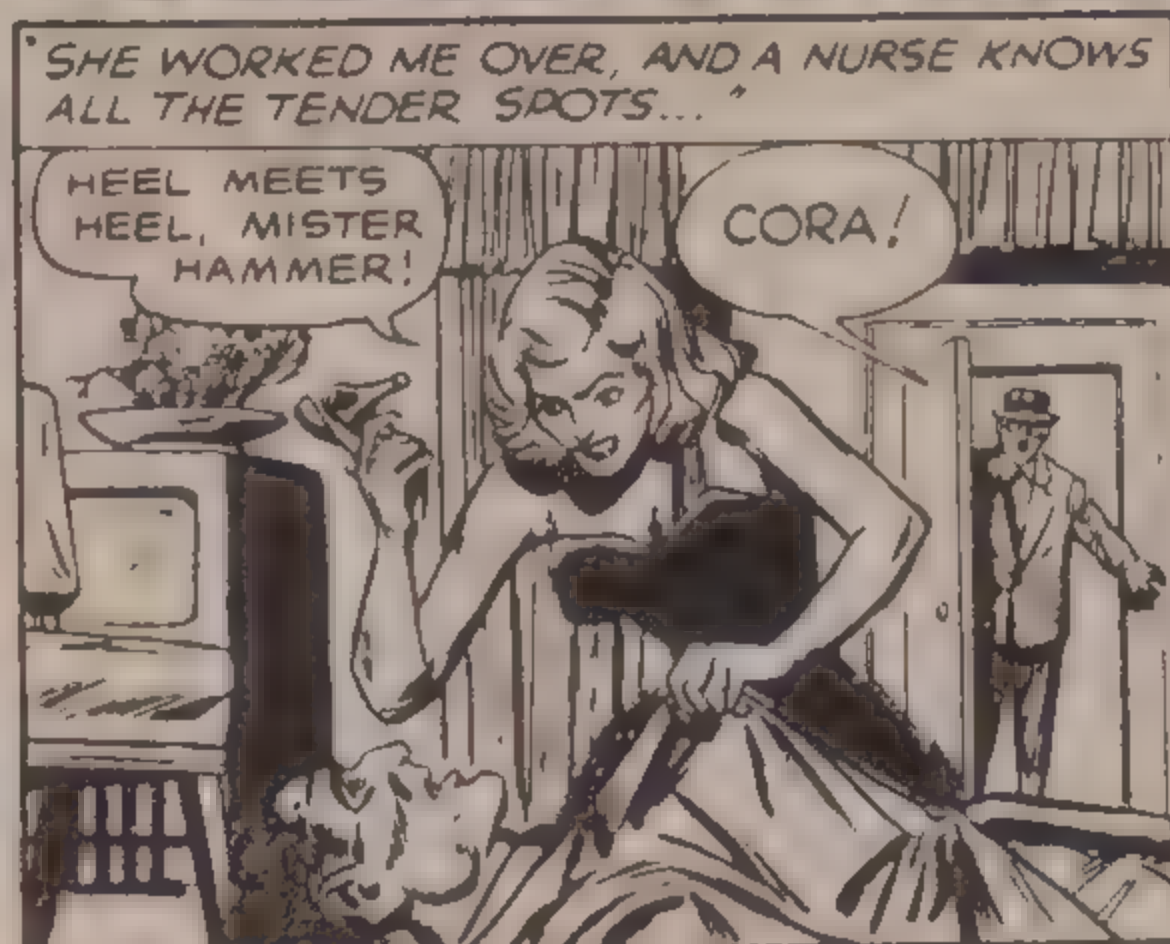
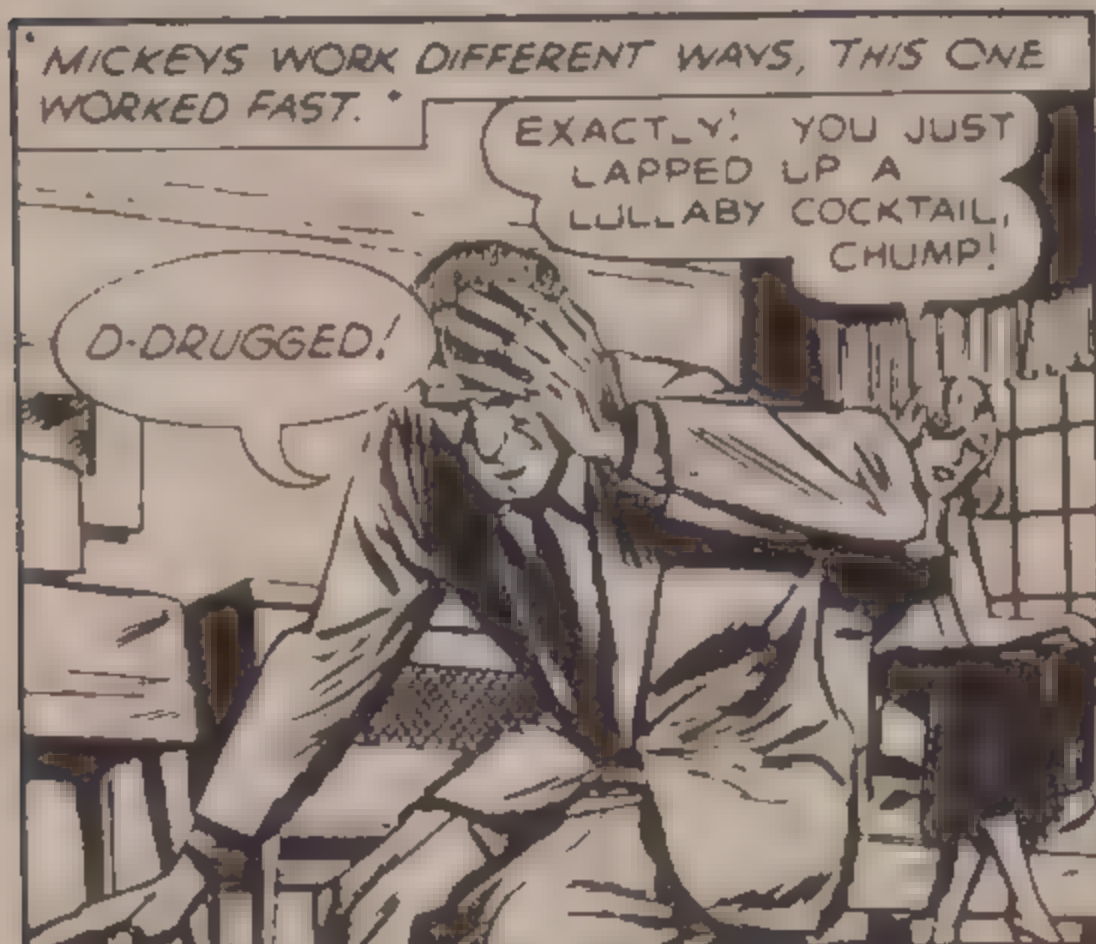
Dominic Muerta has been mentioned in THE PLS and was only tangentially involved in "Deadline" and was only mentioned in passing in "Skin Deep." He and what he represents are too major a part of our heroine's life **not** to be mentioned, but these continuities (and the upcoming "Runaway" and the one shot "Murder at Mohawk" in #9) are essentially non-Muerta stories. We are planning a four issue conclusion to the Muerta cycle beginning **after** "Runaway." In this story Dan Green will at last return - and we can promise you some surprises. Mother of Mercy, is this the end of Muerta? We'll see.

As for MIKE MIST, he's going to be around for a while - short of spinning off into his own book (which could indeed happen someday - nothing much could take his two pages away from him). Reader response on MIST has been mixed - but much in his favor - not unlike the duotone controversy.

Mickey Spillane's

THE COMIC
STRIP

MIKE HAMMER



Mickey Spillane's MIKE HAMMER: The Comic Strip.....5.95

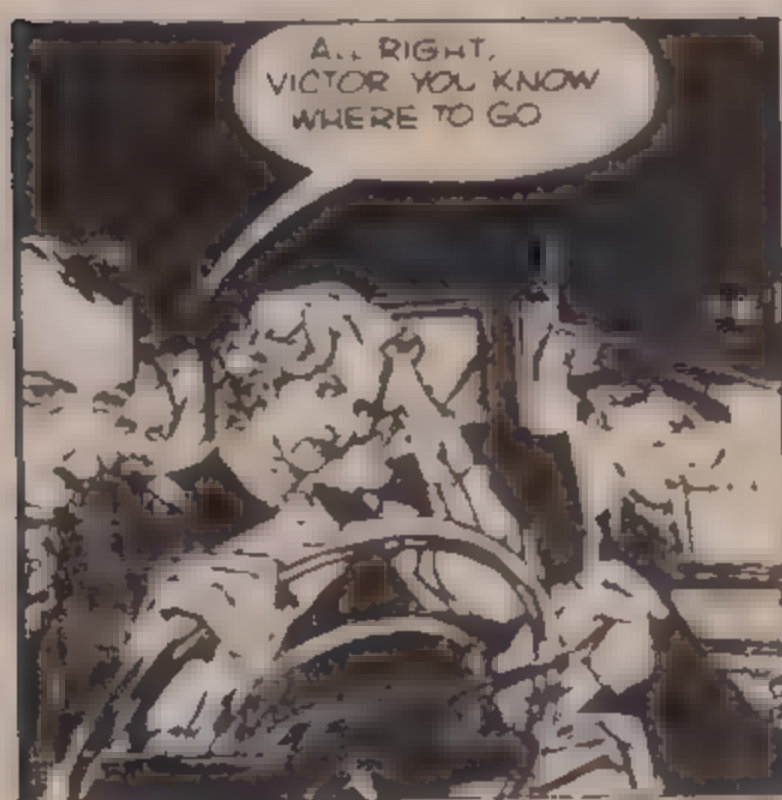
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Long awaited second volume completes the run of the strip that was cancelled for excessive violence.

MODESTY BLAISE

by Peter O'Donnell



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Mrs. Drake mixes psychism & spying, then Uncle Happy & his gang try to murder Modesty

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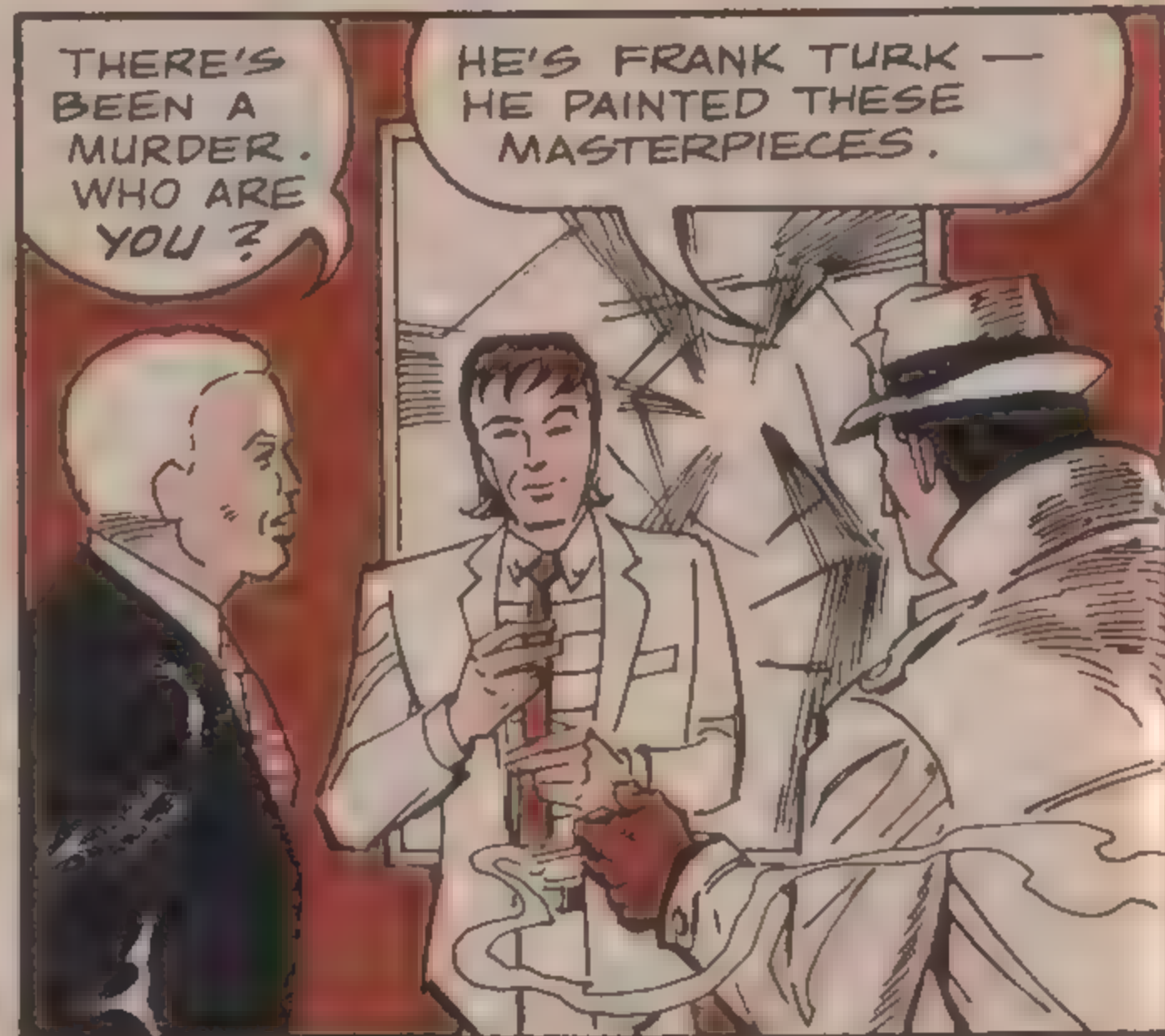
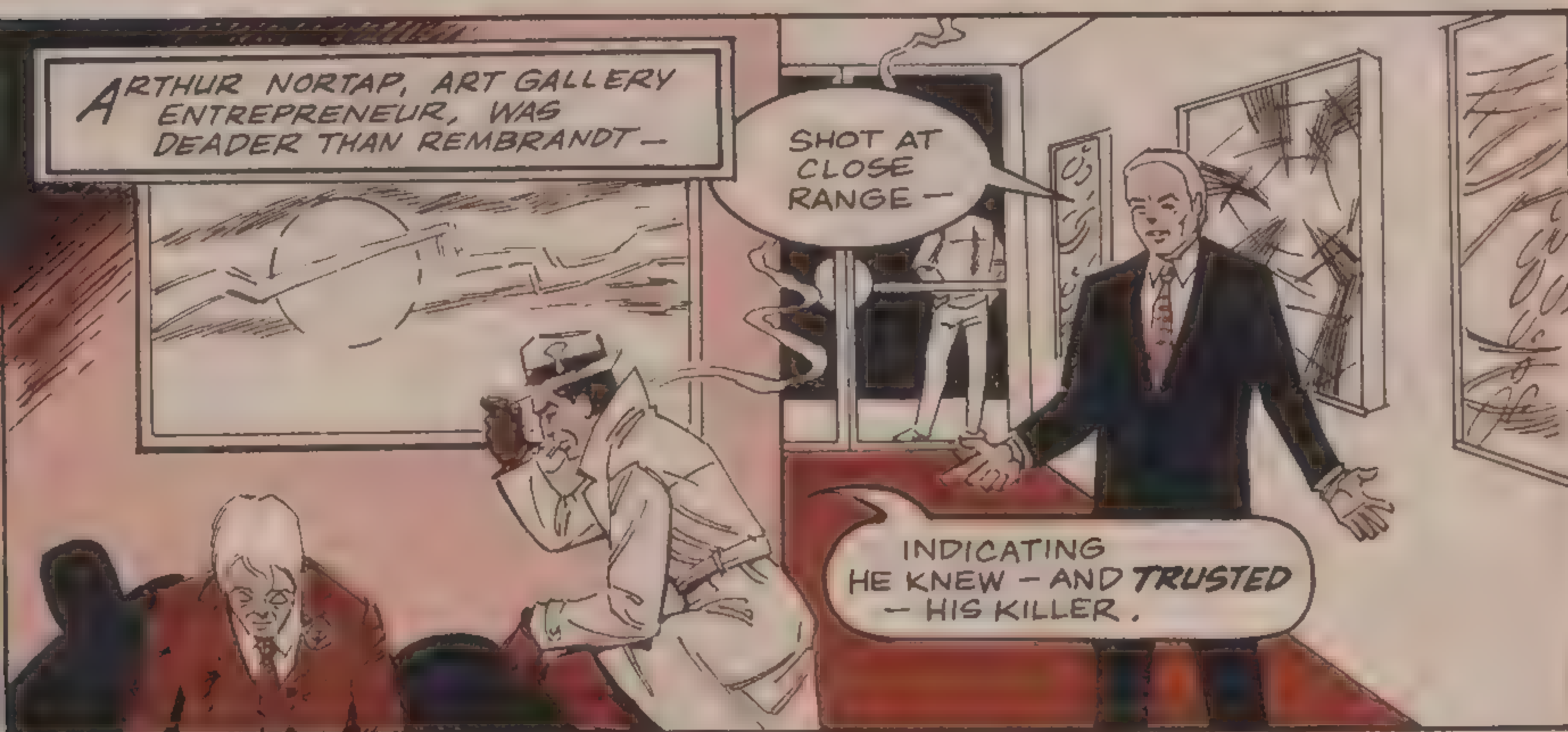
THE MIKE MIST

MINUTE MYSTERIES

© 1984 MAX COLLINS and TERRY BEATTY



"SUITABLE for FRAMING"



FINISHED PENCILS, INKS & LETTERING: GARY KATO

I'D BEEN HIRED TO PROVIDE SECURITY FOR THE NEW SHOW AT THE NORTAP ART GALLERY — MY DUTIES WEREN'T TO BEGIN TILL TOMORROW —



BUT A CALL FROM LT. DIMM INDICATED I WAS NEEDED TONIGHT —



WHOEVER DID IT ENTERED THE CLOSED GALLERY WITH NORTAP'S **BLESSING** — NO SIGN OF B & E.*



* BREAKING AND ENTERING

I'M SORRY ABOUT YOUR LOSS, MRS. NORTAP —



I UNDERSTAND YOU...



F-FOUND THE... BODY? YES (SOB)...



I UNDERSTAND YOU WERE "DISCOVERED" BY NORTAP — TO THE TUNE OF A WHOPPING 50% COMMISSION PER CANVAS...



HEY, IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR A **SUSPECT**, HOW 'BOUT THE MERRY WIDOW, HERE? SHE STANDS TO INHERIT A **BUNDLE** —



YOUNG TURK. WITHOUT BEING TOLD, HE KNEW WHO THE MURDER VICTIM WAS: HE REFERRED TO MRS. NORTAP AS A "WIDOW"!

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TREE "SKIN DEEP"

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Chapter Four

by Max Collins and Terry Beatty

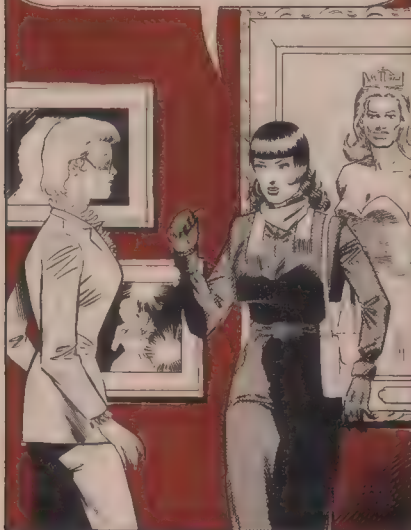
PHOTO FINISH

VERONICA VALER
MAKES A LOVELY
ALL-AMERICAN MISS,
DOESN'T SHE, MS. TREE?

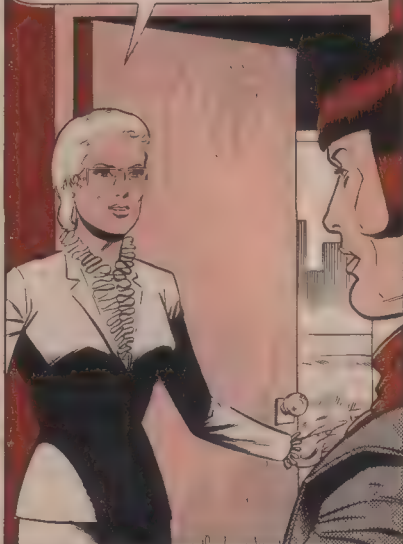


ART ASSIST E. LETTERING: GARY KATO

SHE CERTAINLY DOES, MS. WRIGHT —
THE FIRST **BLACK** ALL-AMERICAN MISS,
AT THAT. TOO BAD THOSE **PHOTOS** MAY
COME OUT, AND TURN SUCH WONDERFUL
PUBLICITY INTO A **SCANDAL** —



IT WOULD BE **TRAGIC** — WOULD YOU
CARE TO STEP INTO MY PRIVATE OFFICE,
MS. TREE? YOU SAID ON THE PHONE OUR
BUSINESS WAS **PERSONAL** THIS TIME —



I DID SOME CHECKING ON YOU, MS. WRIGHT —
YOU'VE BEEN THE **PUBLICITY DIRECTOR**
OF THE PAGEANT FOR NEARLY TEN YEARS.
THE JOB **PAYS** WELL, I UNDERSTAND —



THE PAY **IS** GOOD — BUT THAT'S NOT
IMPORTANT, REALLY. THE WORK IS...
MEANINGFUL. WHAT THE PAGEANT
REPRESENTS FOR THE MODERN YOUNG
WOMAN IS **IMPORTANT**. I WAS AN
ALL-AMERICAN MISS MYSELF.
YOU KNOW —



"I KNOW," I SAID. "SO YOU'RE TIED INTO THE PAGEANT EMOTIONALLY AS WELL AS FINANCIALLY — THAT MAKES A POTENT COCKTAIL."

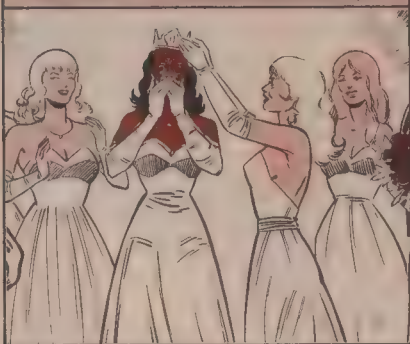


PERHAPS. WHAT'S YOUR POINT, MS. TREE?

YOU SAID IT YOURSELF, THE FIRST TIME WE SPOKE —

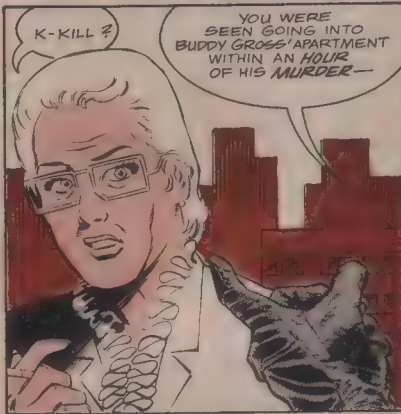


"YOU'D HATE TO SEE THE PAGEANT GIVEN A **NEGATIVE IMAGE** — MY QUESTION IS — WOULD YOU **KILL** TO PRESERVE THE **ALL-AMERICAN MYTH**?"



K-KILL?

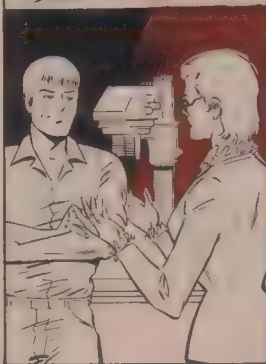
YOU WERE SEEN GOING INTO BUDDY GROSS' APARTMENT WITHIN AN HOUR OF HIS **MURDER** —



I-I WON'T DENY IT —



"I MADE AN APPOINTMENT WITH HIM — OFFERED HIM \$5000 FOR THE PHOTOS —"



"HE LAUGHED AT THAT OFFER — BUT THEN I SAID I MIGHT BE ABLE TO ALSO GET HIM THE JOB OF **OFFICIAL PAGEANT PHOTOGRAPHER** NEXT YEAR —"



BUDDY WAS TEMPTED BY THE BIG BUCKS AND BIG **PRESTIGE** OF THE OFFER — HE SAID HE'D GET BACK TO HER. THE WRIGHT WOMAN HAD EVERY REASON TO BELIEVE SHE'D **BOUGHT GROSS OFF** —

THEN SHE HAD NO REASON TO **KILL HIM** — IF SHE'S TELLING THE TRUTH. DO YOU THINK HARRY RYND GOT WIND THAT GROSS WAS PLANNING TO **CROSS** HIM?

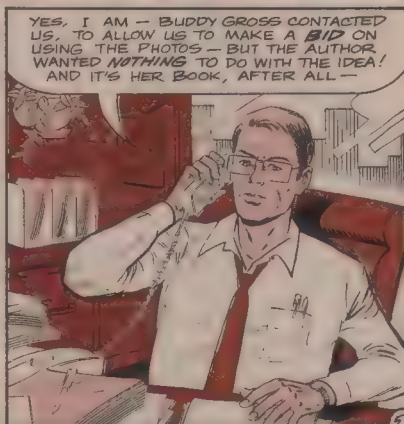
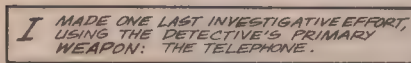
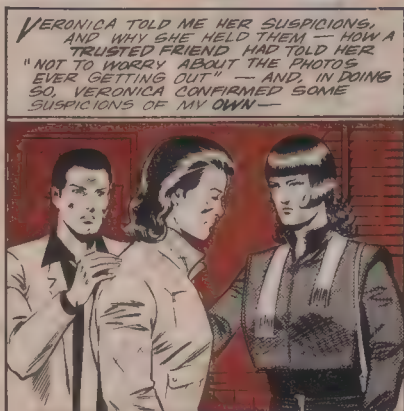
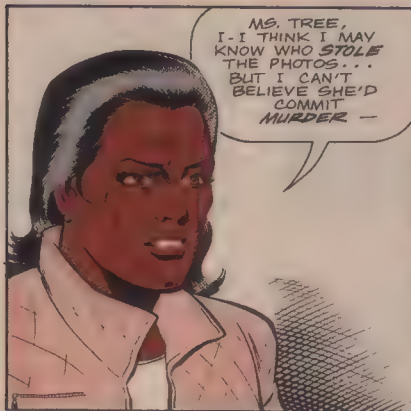
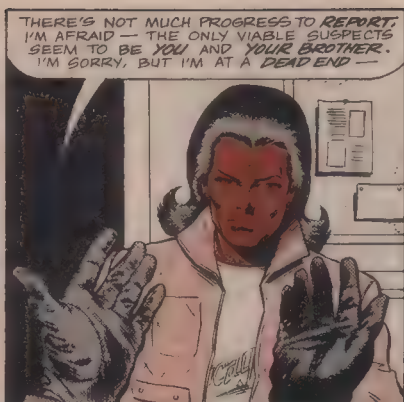


"COULD RYND HAVE KNOWN THAT GROSS PLANNED TO RETURN THE \$15 GRAND TO HIM," RAFE WONDERED. "AND SELL THE PHOTOS INSTEAD TO THE PAGEANT FOR A 'KILL' FEE AND THE PAGEANT PHOTOS SPOT?"

"THE TIME FRAME IS WRONG," I SAID.

GROSS DIED BEFORE HE COULD'VE PASSED THE WORD ALONG TO RYND... UNLESS RYND'S STRONGARM SHOWED UP JUST AFTER MS. WRIGHT, AND GROSS STUPIDLY REVEALED HIS INTENTIONS TO THE THUG. BUT **WOULD** RYND GIVE THE GO-AHEAD TO **KILL** OVER SOMETHING LIKE THIS? DOUBTFUL.

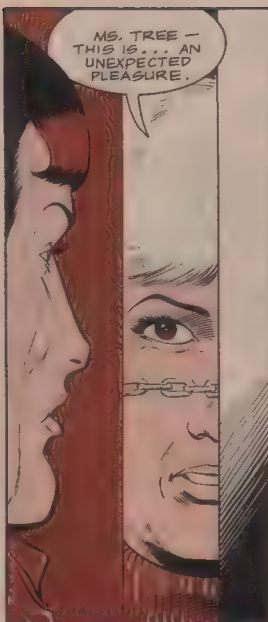




THERE WAS ONLY ONE
STOP LEFT TO MAKE —

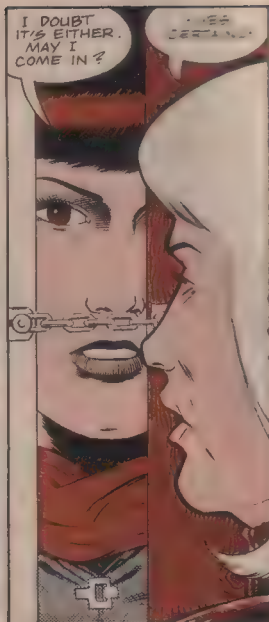


MS. TREE —
THIS IS... AN
UNEXPECTED
PLEASURE.



I DOUBT
IT'S EITHER.
MAY I
COME IN?

YES
CERTAIN.



I TALKED WITH YOUR
EDITOR TODAY — ABOUT THE
BOOK YOU'RE DOING ON
THE HISTORY OF THE
ALL-AMERICAN MISS
PAGEANT —



HE TOLD ME YOU WERE
ADAMANTLY **OPPOSED** TO
BIDDING ON THE
NUDE PHOTOS OF
VERONICA VALER —



THEIR USE WOULD'VE BEEN
... **INAPPROPRIATE** TO THE
BOOK, MS. TREE. I'M HERE
TO **HONOR** THE ALL-AMERICAN
MISS PAGEANT, NOT **BURY** IT —





TO SAY THE LEAST.

I HAVE PHOTOS,
POSTERS, PROGRAM BOOKS,
GOING BACK TO THE
INCEPTION OF THE
PAGEANT IN THE 1930s.
AND THE VARIOUS DOLLS,
AND ALL THEIR CLOTHES—

YOU'RE THE ULTIMATE
ALL-AMERICAN MISS
COLLECTOR.
AREN'T YOU, GLORIA?



IS THAT
WHY YOU KILLED
GROSS AND TOOK
THE PHOTOS?



YES, PARTLY.
MOSTLY IT WAS TO KEEP
THE PAGEANT FROM
GETTING A BLACK EYE.



POOR CHOICE OF WORDS,
GLORIA. *WHERE* ARE
THE PHOTOS?
LET ME HAVE THEM!

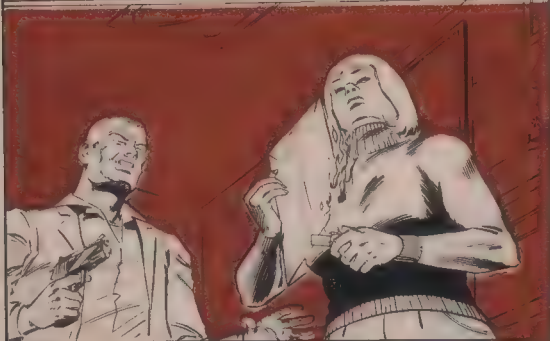




SHE AGREED WITH ME. SHE WAS JUST ABOUT TO GET FIRE TO THE LOT, WHEN-



RYND'S STOOGES MUST'VE FOLLOWED ME HERE —
IN HOPES OF FINDING THE PICTURES —
BUT GLORIA WASN'T ABOUT TO LET HIM HAVE 'EM —



LIKE GLORIA PLAYNE'S
DREAMS OF BEAUTY.

THE END

— FOR BOB RANDISI —

Hi Max!

Congratulations on the nomination of your novel TRUE DETECTIVE as one of the 5 best of 1983! Just goes to show that Katy Keene fans are **top notch!**

I recently had my first fiction publication, a short story in a SF anthology **The Clarion Awards** from Doubleday edited by Damon Knight. I'm not one of the three award winners but I'm delighted to be included in a very good collection of stories

Barb Rausch HOLLYWOOD, CA

Your congratulations are appreciated Barb - and as you may know, TRUE DETECTIVE went on to **win** the Best Novel award of 1983 from the Private Eye Writers of America. And please accept our congratulations for your publication in the Clarion anthology. Damon Knight is one of the alltime S.F. greats and the Clarion workshop is legendary. We're also looking forward to your Vicki Valentine feature (in collaboration with Bili Woggon, in NEIL THE HORSE

Max

Thought you might enjoy seeing this mention in my weekly column. I try to mention your titles whenever I can, since I admire your work. St. Martin's has sent me every mystery title they ever published **except** TRUE DETECTIVE. Maybe I'll catch up to that one in paperback.

Keep it up. Greatly enjoy MS TREE and the TRACY strip.

Jack Curtin DEVON, PA

Jack Curtin syndicates his column "Between The Lines" via Jacey Book Services. In his July 25 review of TOMORROW I DIE, the Mickey Spillane short story collection I introduced and edited for Mysterious Press! he takes time out to mention "the wonderful MS TREE independent comic magazine". Thanks Jack, and I'm going to make sure St. Martin's Press gets a copy of both TRUE DETECTIVE and the current sequel TRUE CRIME to you for review.

Dear Max and Terry

I would like to comment on Jim Doherty's letter published in MS TREE #10. Max's reply covered the situation pretty well but as an "outraged comics fan" I would like to say something. It is true that the general public considers comic books a "children's medium" which is really a shame. It is that kind of attitude that makes it hard for intelligent, literate comics to succeed.

I also find it doubtful that a ten-year old would be interested in a comic such as MS TREE, which I'm sure has an older readership than SUPERMAN. I think it is a good idea to have some kind of labelling system to differentiate comics, but I am afraid that such a system would invite censorship and make the sale of some comics illegal to younger audiences. Good-bye freedom if the Moral Majority ever sees MS TREE. I would hope there would be enough sensible people to stop any crazy actions the MM might take. If not, I'm ready to fight them.

Now that that's out of my system, I would like to add a comment about the duotone coloring. I don't know if it has a firm noir atmosphere, but it was interesting and did not hurt the story. I know that red is more appropriate for murder mysteries (blood), but I would like to see a duotone issue using blue. How about it?

Michael Clem TULSA, OK

As you know by now, Michael's issue #12 was a "blue" book. What did you think? Thanks for your thoughtful letter.

Dear Max & Terry

I apologise if I'm echoing many of your recent letters, but I'll say anyway that I was wary when I heard you were going into the two-tone format, but I've greatly enjoyed the results. I've just read the first two issues - four chapters - of MS TREE under the auspices of Aardvark Vanaheim, and I'm happy to report them as eminently entertaining as Michael's previous adventures. I also prefer the work on newsprint paper instead of heavier stock, as this complements the sort of toning you use. (Even the colours in the P.I.S. seem a little garish, but I enjoyed the first issue of that, too!) I'm not sure about a blue issue, as the red tone obviously lends itself to flesh colouring (and to blood!), but I'm sure that this is only because it's something new.

In response to the suitability-for-children letter, I don't think that the fact that MS TREE is a direct-sales comic makes any objections besides the point, as certainly here in England I find that quite a few children get their comics from speciality shops. However, your acknowledgement that your readership does stretch into early-teen-agers will presumably affect some of the ways you present the stories. And meanwhile, we older readers prefer seeing things performed in a realistic fashion, and MS TREE obviously contains material that a code-restricted book could not carry. The only worry - some sort of backlash from the Moral Majority, or whatever the British comics press has just reported a pillorying of comics in the U.S. on the TV show. The 700 Club, and though such criticisms, or at least the idea of them being taken seriously, seems unbelievable here in Britain, there should certainly be some awareness of any possibility of some renewed "Seduction of the Innocent" type campaign. We surely don't want to see "18-or-over-only" on our comic shop doors, so maybe the answer unfortunately is some sort of "For mature readers" label. Or maybe it is enough to rely on the shop owners' discretion in who they sell their comics to. After all, a "for mature readers" label may well have the same effect that "Only to be sold to persons over 21" has on encouraging younger readers to buy girls' magazines. Ideally, everyone else will come to realise that comics are no more inherently a children's medium than are novels or films or any other form of entertainment.

Anyway, I've said enough. Here's to continuing success to you both (and Gary Kato) and A-V.

Malcolm Bourne LONDON, ENGLAND

Terry and I go back and forth on the question of a labelling system, in one sense it seems proper that MS TREE say "For Mature Readers", in another that might, as some of our SWAK correspondents imply, be waving a red flag inviting criticism. What do you think, readers?

Dear SWAK,

People - I'll make this short. MS TREE #12, my comments I like the coloring in this comic, the one color format works very well. I think you should only use one color per story (all of "Deadline" in red, next story in blue) can't wait to see green! Another price increase? How about charging more for advertisements? MS TREE is very unique for comics and I like the title very much (I've been reading comics for 12 years). Keep MIKE MIST for same reasons you stated when responding to Ms. Holden's letter. Gary Dunaier's letter and your response made me laugh. Keep the 2 page letter columns MS TREE, MS TREE, MS TREE!

Gordon Ornelas WASHINGTON, D.C.

The A-V issues of MS TREE are 5 cents cheaper than the final Eclipse issue, so there really hasn't been an increase. As a non-newsstand book, we can't give this package to you at any lower price, though we wish we could. Your enthusiasm is much appreciated. Gordon.

SWAK

Ummm good! Like the color experiment, added MS TREE pages like the 2 page MIKE MIST series, and good grade of paper. MS TREE is a fine, in fact, superb addition to comics. I'm a fan -

Kim Peterson, SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH

Dear Max and Terry

Thank you for the autographed proof I won. The only thing is that I have not yet received it. I didn't even know I won until issue #8 came in late with issue #9 at my bookstore. I then thought it would be best to wait until you started with your new publisher. Well anyway, thanks for the great book.

Brett Ziegler, FRESNO, CA

Brett, not only have we not sent your proof to you, we just ran across this letter, which got lost on my desk (how that for an excuse?). We'll get your signed proof off to you soon - by the time you read this, in fact, you may already have it.



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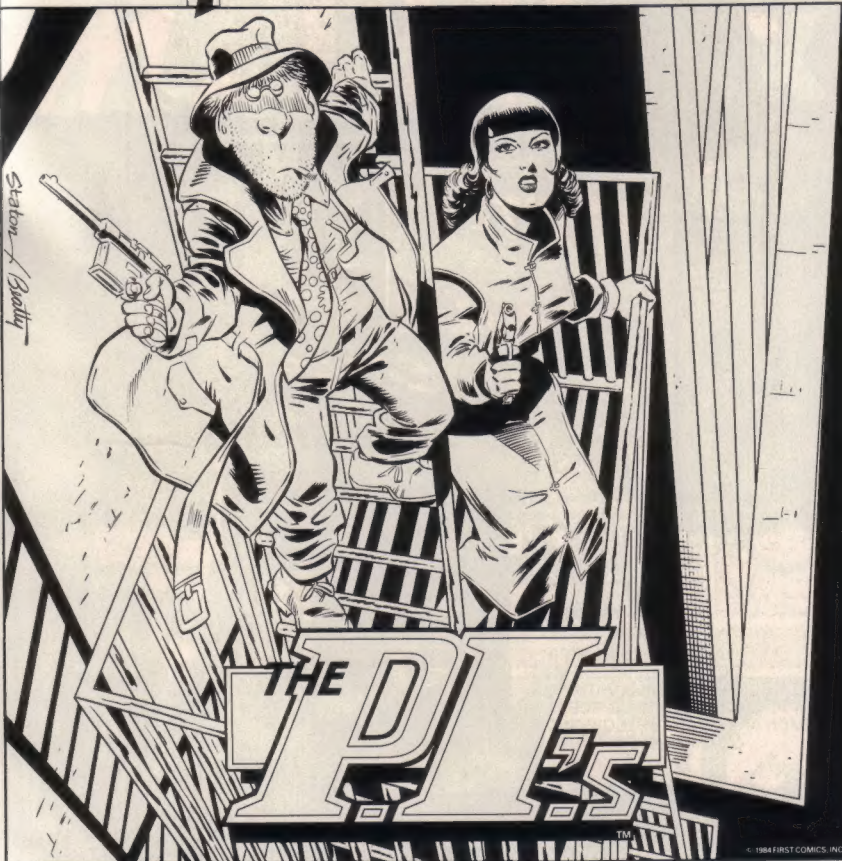


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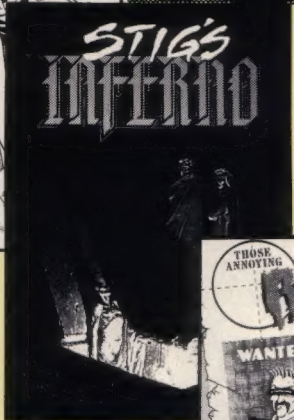
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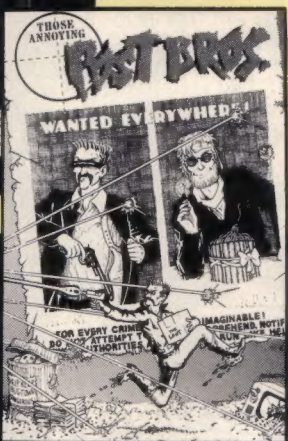
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